FARM LABOR NEWS

Vol. 2, No. 4 — Washington, D. C. — April, 1948 — 3rd Year

What's New In Washington

By H. L. MITCHELL, President

Importing Mexican Farm Hands

The agreement for importing Mexican nationals into the United States for work on farms has been signed by our government and that of Mexico. The new contract for bringing in Mexican nationals replaces the agreements of 1943 and the one of 1947.

How It Works

Here is the way it was supposed to work. Any big farmer who wants to import Mexican workers must get a certificate from the U. S. Employment Service stating that American workers are not available at prevailing wages. That means that if a farm operator offers a wage that no American can live on, he has the right to import all the Mexican workers he needs. There are no methods for deciding what are prevailing wages on the farms of any given area in the United States. The U. S. Employment Service is supposed to use its influence to get fair wages.

After the U. S. Employment Service has certified that there are no Amreicans willing to work for the wage the farm operator offers, the employer then gets a permit from the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to bring in Mexican citizens.

To Cost The Taxpayer $200 A Man

The U. S. and the Mexican governments have approved a contract to be signed by the employer and Mexican worker. Then the employer sends an agent to Mexico and he gets in touch with the Mexican government who will tell him where he can recruit the labor he wants to bring into the United States. The employer is supposed to post bond to insure the return of the workers to Mexico when he is through with them. After he hires the labor, the employer then purchases railroad tickets from Mexico to the place in the United States where the Mexicans are to work. It is estimated that the cost of getting each worker from Mexico to the United States will be about $200 per man. Since this will be an operating cost connected with farming, the employer can charge it off on his income tax next March and the taxpayers will still foot the bill for him.

'Protecting The Mexican'— The Joker In The Deck

To protect the Mexican worker, there are some pious provisions in the workers' agreement about how he can request the U. S. Employment Service to protect him from exploitation under the contract. The Mexican worker can get in touch with the nearest Mexican consul to secure help. With few exceptions, the Mexican consuls in the United States will have little or no interest in the Mexican peon who may be sent to the United States to work on a farm. As a rule, Mexican consuls are "big shots" who have been in this country a long time, accumulated property, and forgotten that they were once Mexican citizens. They may be expected to assist the big farm operator and exploit their own people.

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Fights Farm Labor

ROBERT F. SCHMEISER

Robert F. Schmeiser is president of the Associated Farmers of California, Inc. The organization headed by Schmeiser is responsible for the long duration of the Di Giorgio strike in Kern County, near Bakersfield. The strike is now in its seventh month. Labor people in California and in other parts of the country believe that Joseph Di Giorgio, head of the multi-million dollar Di Giorgio Fruit Corp., would have signed a union contract with his employees possibly before the strike was called if it had not been for men like Schmeiser and their organization, the notorious Associated Farmers.

The organization Mr. Schmeiser heads is the rural branch of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, known nationally as the MAM. It was formed in the 1930's for the purpose of preventing labor organization in rural areas. Reports of the U. S. Senate Civil Liberties Committee headed by former Senator Robert LaFollette, show that hundreds of thousands of dollars were poured into the Associated Farmers, Inc., by big industries, banks and insurance companies. In the days of the "Grapes of Wrath," thousands of uprooted farm families from the mid-western and southwestern states were driven off the land by depression, drought and tractors. When they arrived in California, they found the Associated Farmers organized and ready for them. When the farm workers tried to organize, they were beaten down by mobs of vigilantes organized by the Associated Farmers. There were many spontaneous strikes of farm workers against the terrible conditions then prevailing on California's large farms. These wildcat strikes usually started without any form of organization or trade union support and often attracted undesirable leadership. Communist party organizers seized control of many of these agricultural strikes and used them for political purposes. This played directly into the hands of the Associated Farmers who would start a hue and cry of "Communist" every time farm workers tried to improve their conditions. The leaders of the Associated Farmers worked out a nice scheme for getting money from big industrialists and lining up small farm operators to do their dirty work. Then the United States Senate sent a committee to investigate. The Associated Farmers organization was exposed for what it actually was, a labor hating, strike breaking racket. During the war years, farm wages rose to new levels, conditions were improved to some extent for the hired hands on the big farms and the Associated Farmers almost died out.

In 1946, Robert Schmeiser became president and when the National Farm Labor Union came to California, the Associated Farmers took a new lease on life. They hired a first class publicity agent. They began yelling that the Communists were getting active again in California agriculture. They charged that the National Farm Labor Union was Communist led. They said that the Di Giorgio strike was a Communist plot. But by this time, they had cried wolf so often that they did not succeed in getting the small farmers up in arms to do their dirty work. The yellow journals like the Hearst press of Los Angeles and the Bakersfield Californian took up the battle of the Associated Farmers against the workers. The state legislature was called in to investigate the "un-American activity" in the Di Giorgio strike. Everything backfired on the Associated Farmers. The state legislature could find no evidence of un-American activity in the union.

The American Federation of Labor Unions, a million and a half strong in California alone, was found to be 100 per cent behind the National Farm Labor Union. Labor has given thousands of dollars for strike relief and has sent men to visit the pickets lines and [illegible] The Di Giorgio strike soon became a crusade for the [illegible] of thousands of workers to fight the [illegible] a labor union of [illegible] on the strike scene [illegible] for aid.

Di Giorgio Strike News

The Di Giorgio strike is now entering its 7th month with no settlement in sight as the Farm Labor News goes to press.

Grocery Clerks Won't Handle Di Giorgio Products

Local 770 of the Retail Clerks International Union A. F. of L., has voted to declare all Di Giorgio Fruit Corp. products "hot cargo" and to refuse to handle them in Los Angeles stores. Eastern unions have been notified and urged to refuse to handle the company's products also.

Winery Closed Down By Pickets

The Swiss Colony winery of Tarpley, California, bought 17 tank cars holding 300,000 gallons of wine from the DiGiorgio Fruit Corp. When the tank cars were placed on the siding near the Swiss Colony plant, pickets from the Di Giorgio Farms appeared. The winery closed down when members of the Winery Workers Union and the Carpenters refused to cross the picket line. The Swiss Colony Co. then filed a charge before the National Labor Relations Board claiming that the Kern County Local 218 was engaged in a secondary boycott. No action has been taken by the Board to date and attorneys for the National Farm Labor Union pointed out that the Taft-Hartley Law specifically exempts agricultural workers from all its provisions.

Food Relief Caravans Move In Kern County

On February 6, a caravan of cars and trucks from southern California unions brought 160 tons of food and clothing and about $6,000 to aid the strikers on the Di Giorgio Ranch. In March 20, another still larger labor union caravan arrived from northern California. Led by Jack Shelly, President of the California State Federation of Labor, this labor friendship caravan brought 165 tons of food and clothing and $13,000 in cash to aid the strikers. The food and cash contributions were presented by Daniel V. Flanagan, A. F. of L. western director from San Francisco. At a meeting that night, attended by 2,000 strikers and their friends, President Shelly said, "This is one problem and one fight. The American Federation of Labor will back you in the Di Giorgio fight until you win." Shelly also announced that plans were under way for an even larger caravan to come from all the 11 western days in about 30 days.

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Fruit Pickers Local 201 Executive Board Meets

Executive board members of Citrus Workers Local 201 met in the Central Labor Union hall in Lakeland on Sunday, March 21. It was decided to move the office of the Union to Lakeland on the early date. A monthly [illegible] and other [illegible] of importance to [illegible]

Early History Of Labor Unions

Long before the Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776 and the foundation laid for the United States of America, there were organizations of working men.

The first unions were made up of skilled craftsmen who joined together to provide assistance to each other, when members wer sick, in debt, or at the time of death of a wage earner.

When the American merchant class started, both workmen and employers were against their methods of buying cheaply and selling as at high a price as the market would bear. However, the employers of the workers were soon forced by competition to accept the position of the merchants. Then true labor unions came into being. The first of these labor unions were carpenters, shoe makers and printers. These workmen formed local unions in Boston, New York and Philadelphia as early as 1791 for the purpose of stopping wages from being cut. In addition to the welfare schemes for helping each other, these unions wanted higher wages and shorter hours. They also tried to set rules for training new workers in their trades and to secure from employers agreements to hire only union men. This last started what is known as the "closed shop."

By the year 1800, the principle ot collective bargaining was understood both by workers and employers. The first meeting between workers and employers occurred in 1799. The shoe makers met with their employers to set wage rates and working conditions. Then it became necessary for committees of the union men to visit the shops and see if the agreements were being lived up to by employers and workers alike. The walking committee or walking delegates served without pay in the beginning. As the unions grew stronger they began to hire men to attend to this kind of business on a part time or full time basis. The men who do this kind of work are now known as business agents.

Early Strikes In America

Strikes or action of working men quitting their jobs in a body came with organization and collective bargaining in America. The bread bakers in New York quit work to enforce the demands of their union as early as 1741. The first strike where a union paid benefits to its members occurred in Philadelphia in 1786. The strikers were printers. A sympathy strike of shoe workers to aid their fellow workers who made boots also happened in 1799 in the same city. The shoe makers of New York created a strike benefit fund and in 1809 went out on what is known as a general strike. The strike was extended to several employers who came to the aid of the ones against whom the strike was started.

Employers vs. The Unions

As the unions became better organized, wage rates became more important. Employers banded together to oppose wage demands made by their workers. Often the employers went into court to have unions declared unlawful. They also hired non-union workers. The unions were prosecuted under the old English law as "conspiracies on restraint of trade." This method of opposing unions lasted for nearly 100 years. A business depression in the early 1800's caused many of the early unions to die out. But by 1820 new workers' organizations were springing up in both large and smal American cities. Unions were organized by hatters, tailors, weaver. nailers and cabinet makers. Organizations of workers in factories first appeared.

Early Unions In Politics

From 1827 to 1832, American trade unions became very interested in politics. Many working men were barred from voting by the various states which required that men own a certain amount of property before being qualified to vote. There were no free schools for children of working people. Only those who were wealthy and could afford to pay were able to educate their children. Since unions were being prosecuted in the courts, they turned to the ballot box. Also, new industries were starting and large cities were being built since the steam engines and railroads were coming into being. A lot more industrial workers were needed than ever before.

The movement of the workers to go into politics spread to many towns and cities. In Philadelphia all of the unions joined together in the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations and nominated candidates for office "to represent the interests of the working classes" in the city government and state legislature. Local labor parties sprang up in many cities. These political movements were supported by about 50 labor newspapers. The program of the workers in politics included: demands for laws to provide a 10 hour day; restrictions on child labor; abolition of convict labor making goods for sale in competition with free men; free and equal public schools; abolition of imprisonment for debt; exemption of tools and wages from seizure for debt; the right of mechanics to file liens on property to secure payment of their wages; and the abolition of home and factory sweatshops. Most of the labor political parties were against chattel slavery.

These early unions and political parties of labor were responsible for the enactment of laws abolishing the imprisonment of men for debt, the 10 hour work day, and the great American free public school system.

—To be continued next month.

What's New In Washington

(Continued from Page One)

in the United States for at least two years under the contract and 10 per cent of them may remain for 18 months. Mexican workers who were brought into the United States last year and before, may also be included under the new contract, and stay here.

How Foreign Workers May Be Imported

This question was asked the U. S. Employment Service along the last of March. They said they did not know. It may be that 60,000 will come in and it may be that 100,000 or more will be imported. Farm labor conditions in the United States will be the deciding factor. If we go to war or start the war materials factories again this year there is no telling how many will be brought in.

How Close Is War?

It looks bad here in Washington. The United States is getting tough with Russia. President Truman has called for renewing the draft law. This may pass soon and men from 18 to 35 years of age unmarried and without dependents may be called up for service in the armed forces. Of course, an incident can start another world war. Many People believe that Russia is not ready for another war. They lost most of their industry and had nearly 10 million men killed or wounded in the last war. They still have plenty of manpower but it takes more than that to fight a modern war. The United States has the atom bomb. No one knows what sort of new weapon Russia may have.

Education Director

ERNESTO GALARZA

Research and Education Director Ernesto Galarza, recently appointed as Research and Education Director for the Union, assumed his duties March 1st. On March 18, he left for a two weeks trip through the southwestern states. In late April or early May he will make a similar trip through the southern states, attending Union meetings and getting educational work under way.

The problem of protecting civil rights of Mexican-Americans will be given special attention by Mr. Galarza.

Placement Director At Work

During the past month, Lee Parker, Labor Placement Director, visited southeast Missouri and attended meetings of local unions in Lilbourn and Wardell. On March 14, he attended and addressed a meeting at Brinkley, Ark. At this meeting which was arranged by local organizer, L. B. Armstrong, about 28 members were present. The next week Parker spent in the Pine Bluff area conferring with local leaders of the Union. He reported a good meeting by the Gould Local which was well attended. Following this work in the Delta area of Arkansas, he stopped over at various points in Tennessee and North Carolina, reporting to the Washington office on March 29, to accompany the President through New Jersey, New York state. During early April, Brother Parker will visit the locals in Clewiston and Lakeland, Florida, returning to the Memphis office to begin shipments of workers to New Jersey and elsewhere the last of the month.

Mid South Organizer Makes Report

George Stith, mid-South organizer, is now getting about since the weather has improved and he has a car. He visited the Cotton Plant area where he attended meetings and made house to house canvasses in Howell and Hunter early in the month. Returning to his home at Gould, he attended a meeting of the Varner Local, returning to Brinkley on March 14th for a meeting with Labor Placement Director Parker. During the month he also visited the Dumas Local where arrangements are underway for a big mass meeting on Sunday, April 4th.

Brother Stith also reports that the Wolf Project Local near Lake Village has shown interest in setting up a co-operative store.

The Inadequate Social Security Program

The 1946 annual yearbook of the Federal Security Agency reveals a most meagre form of social security in the United States in 1946. Under the Old Age and Survivors Insurance program, the average monthly benefit per family was $30.09. Furthermore, even this benefit was suspended if the beneficiaries earned as much as $15 a month. As a result, some persons had to obtain old age assistance to supplement their old age pension or their earnings. The average payment per person under the old age assistance programs, aid was a little larger. The average monthly payment per family under the aid to dependent children program was $62.23; and the average under the aid to the blind program was $36.67.

Unemployment insurance activities under the social security program were particularly important during 1946, the first year of reconversion. About 7 million workers filed claims for unemployment insurance, and almost 4½ million claimants received at least one benefit check. The average weekly benefit actually paid was $18.50; the average duration of unemployment was 13.4 weeks, and some 38.2 per cent of all persons receiving a first payment exhausted their benefits.

As a result of the large number of persons unemployed during reconversion and of the reduced tax rates for employers under experience rating, benefit payments in 1946 were 20 per cent more than the amounts collected under unemployment programs. The report points out that "contribution rates continued to decline under the state experience-rating provisions. As a result, tax collections in 1946 were 21.5 per cent below the $1,162 million collected in 1945, despite a slight rise in taxable wages."

In most countries and for most people, social security also involves some form of disability and health insurance, but the Social Security Yearbook points out that in the United States the various programs attempting to meet these needs "compensate only a minor fraction of the total wage loss, estimated at $5 to $6 billion annually, experienced by the 2 to 2½ million persons who are disabled on an average day." Workmen's compensation payments are notoriously inadequate, amounting to at best ⅔ of a worker's weekly wage, while only Rhode Island and California have disability programs.

All agricultural and domestic workers are barred from even the meager provisions of the present social security laws. The National Farm Labor Union has recently established its headquarters in Washington, D. C., where it will carry on a fight to strengthen and improve these social security laws as well as to extend them to agricultural workers.

A Billion Cigarettes Smoked Every Day

The sale of tailor made cigarettes is booming. 325 billion cigarettes were sold in 1946 and the figures for 1947 are expected to be even higher. The use of smoking tobacco, chewing tobacco and snuff is declining each year. Back in 1920, American men smoked 8 billion cigars but now there are hardly half as many sold.

What Would Truman Do?

Every one wonders what Roosevelt would do if he were still President. The joke in Washington now is, "What would Truman do if he were still alive?"

JOBS FOR UNION MEMBERS

A farm labor service to provide jobs for members of the National Farm Labor Union is now under way. The service is headed by J. R. Parker, Director of Labor Placement for the Union. Brother Parker has already made field trips through Arkansas and Missouri, addressing meetings and lining up workers for seasonal jobs in canning plants and on farms.

The first shipment of workers will be made in late April or early May. About 200 women workers, age 21 to 50, are wanted in the Swedesboro plant of the Edgar F. Hurff Co. at this time. The canning plant operators, Hurff, Heinz and Ritter will have jobs open during tomato season for men as well as women workers. Plans are also under way to place a large number of workers on farms during harvest season this year.

Workers who want jobs must be members of the National Farm Labor Union and their dues must be paid up for at least three months before they will be eligible for a job this season. New members must pay their initiation fee and 3 months dues before going out on a job. Each man or woman interested in going on a job is asked to fill out the job application blank below and send it in right away.

Job Application

NATIONAL FARM LABOR UNION
512 Victor Building
Washington 1, D. C.

Number .....

Date .....

Name ..... Social Security Number .....

Address .....
Route No Box No. Town State

(Check X)

Age ..... Height ..... Weight ..... Man ..... Woman ..... White ..... Colored .....

Married ..... Single ..... If married, number of children ..... Ages .....

Education: Can you read? ..... Can you write? ..... Last grade in school .....

Are you a member of the National Farm Labor Union in good standing? .....

Name or number of your local .....

Have you ever worked in a canning plant? ..... If so, when and where? .....

.....

Tell what kind of work you have been doing and the name of your last employer .....

.....

.....

.....

Can you drive a tractor? ..... Wheel Type ..... Crawler Type .....

Can you drive a truck? ..... What make of truck? .....

Do you have a driver's license? ..... What state? .....

Do you have a health card? ..... What date is on the card? .....

Do you have a rupture? ..... If so, do you wear a properly fitted truss? .....

Are you crippled in any way? ..... Is your hearing good? ..... Sight good? .....

If you are disabled in any way, describe .....

.....

What kind of work do you want? Canning plant ..... Farm job ..... (Check X)

What date can you leave for a job? .....

.....
Worker's Signature (or Mark)

Truman's 10 Points For Civil Rights

On February 2, President Harry S. Truman called upon Congress to enact into law a program to protect the legal rights of all American citizens. President Truman recommended the following:

1. A permanent commission on Civil Rights to look into civil rights policies and practices; a joint committee of Congress on civil rights and a Civil Rights Division in the U. S. Department of Justice to enforce the laws of the land.

2. A law to make lynching a federal crime and to take its prosecution out of the hands of local and state governments.

3. The abolition of the poll tax and the white primary.

4. The setting up of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission to stop discrimination on jobs.

5. The outlawing of Jim Crow laws in trains, buses and other public services.

6. The strengthening of laws to give equal treatment to all residents of the United States whether citizens or non-citizens.

7. The right to vote and home rule for the District of Columbia, Washington.

8. The admission of Hawaii and Alaska as states; self government for the Virgin Islands and Porta Rica; and citizenship for Guam and Samoa residents.

9. Abolition of racial laws barring some Asiatics from becoming American citizens.

10. Payment of damages to Japanese Americans who were forced to leave the West coast during the war.

Most of these proposals deal with the legal rights of Negroes, of whom there are about 13 million, the majority living in the Southern states. Although it is not so widely known, there are approximately 5 million American citizens of Mexican descent who are discriminated against in the same way as Negroes.

The majority of Mexican Americans live in the western states. At least three fourths of these two large majority groups in America are employed in agricultural work and are therefore eligible for membership in the National Farm Labor Union. Other large minority groups who are discriminated against in America are Jewish people and Japanese-Americans.

Farm Labor News

The Farm Labor News is published monthly by the National Farm Labor Union.

Publication office — 12 N. Lawrence St., Montgomery, Ala.

Business Office — Room 512, Victor Building, 726 - 9th St. N.W., Washington, D. C.

The subscription rate is 36¢ per year. 3¢ per copy. Bundle rate 1¢ per copy to agents.

The Farm Labor News is published by the National Farm Labor Union for its members and friends who are subscribers.

Entered as second class matter at Post Office, Montgomery, Alabama, June 16, 1946, under the act of March 3, 1879.

Address all communications concerning the Farm Labor News to: Room 512, Victor Building, 726 - 9th St. N.W., Washington, D. C.

"I Yield To The Gentleman From Mississippi"

As the Farm Labor News goes to press, it looks as if the Republican Congress may repeal the poll tax and even consider anti-lynching and fair employment practices legislation this year. The southern Democrats will surely try a filibuster to stop such laws from being passed. Filibusters do not work in the House of Representatives where there are rules to shut off debates but in the Senate two-thirds vote to impose "cloture" and close the debate is required. The Senate can stay in session until the filibusterers are worn out but in issues such as the President's civil rights program, there are enough southern senators to keep the debate going forever. The only recourse is for a two-thirds vote to stop the debate.

Where Will The Democrats Go?

Hodding Carter, Mississippi editor, writing for the New York Times, says that the Southern Democrats who are up in arms against President Truman's civil rights program, remind him of the preacher and the sinner. It seems that the preacher called on a well known sinner in his town. After threatening the man with eternal hell fire without much success, he got very angry and started to leave the house. Walking out, he slammed the door behind him and found that he was in a dark closet.

National Office Now In Washington

The National office of the Union is now located in Washington, D. C. It was transferred from Memphis on March 15th. The offices are in the Victor Building, 726 Ninth St., Northwest. The telephone number is Republic 6613. A formal opening will be held some time in April. President William Green of the American Federation of Labor and a member of NFLU Local 204 is being invited to attend the opening.

Where Do You Stand?

How do you regard the Taft-Hartley Act?

Are you for it or against it?

Recently, Senator Robert A. Taft and other supporters of this legislation have been making speeches trying to make the public believe that the Taft-Hartley Act is opposed only to labor leaders and that the rank and file of labor union members are really in favor of it.

We think the public ought to know the truth.

That is why we are conducting this nation-wide poll.

This is an entirely secret ballot. We want you to express your honest opinion with perfect freedom. All you have to do is to place a check in the box beside either of the two questions below and mail to Poll Department, American Federation of Labor, Washington, D. C.

I am for the Taft-Hartley Act ( )

I am against the Taft-Hartley Act ( )

Please mark your ballot above and mail to Poll Department, American Federation of Labor, Washington, D. C.

Farm Labor Round Up

The Department of Labor's Farm Labor Report for March states that there were more hired hands on farms than the month before, except for the west coast states. The decrease in the West is unusual. Part of it is probably due to the prolonged drouth in the San Joaquin Valley in California. In the South, field work was delayed by bad weather, however, some plowing was underway and barring more unfavorable weather, much of the cotton crop will be planted in April. Truck crops were being planted along the coast in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. In Florida the winter harvest of vegetables was underway. The citrus fruit harvest is coming to an end in central Florida, with members of the National Farm Labor Union reported to be working about three day a week in the groves. The packing houses are still trying to cut wages of fruit pickers and unorganized workers have taken cuts from 2 to 3 cents per box.

Farm Wage Rates Off and On

The average rate paid to hired farm labor in the United States was slightly lower on January 1st this year than on October 1, 1947. The average for the United States as a whole was $5.20 per day at the beginning of the year. It was $5.25 per day last Ictober. A more revealing figure is the Department of Agriculture's index on prices received by farmers and the ratio of these prices to wages paid farm labor. Taking 1910-14 as 100, both for prices of farm products and farm wages, by 1939 the average was 108 for farm products, with farm labor still 100. However, on January 1, 1948, the farm price index had reached 304, while the farm wage rate had fallen to 75.

Sugar Beet Wages Set By U. S. Dept. of Agriculture

The Department of Agriculture has just announced the setting of minimum wage rates for field workers in the sugar beet growing states other that California. The wage rates may not be less than 60¢ an hour for hoeing, thinning or weeding, and not less than 65¢ an hour for chopping.

Piece work rates were set at minimums of $11 to $14 per acre for thinning beets without machine blocking. Where beets are thinned with machine blocking, the rates will range from $9.00 to $11.00 an acre. Hoeing wages are set at rates from $2.25 per acre to $6.00 per acre, depending on the method of cultivation.

Piece rates during the harvest are set at not less than $1.20 per acre to $2.25 per acre for heavy yielding beet land. Incentive payments to keep the workers on the farm the year round may also be paid.

Under the Sugar Control Law of 1937, growers are required to pay the minimum wage to field workers cultivating or harvesting sugar cane and beets before they receive government subsidy payments. The wages are set by the U. S. Department of Agriculture officials after public hearings are held. However, as a rule only growers and their representatives appear and have their say as to what the workers are to be paid. Most of the sugar beet workers are Mexican-American and are unorganized.